



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Ukraine

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The 1996 constitution and the 1991 law on freedom of conscience provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were isolated problems at the local level due to local officials taking sides in disputes between religious organizations. Religious groups of all beliefs flourished; however, some local officials impeded attempts by minority and nontraditional religious groups to register and to buy or lease property.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Registration and property restitution problems remained; however, the Government continued to facilitate the return of some communal properties.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were some exceptions, particularly among leaders of rival branches of the same faith. There were isolated cases of anti-Semitism and anti-Islamism. The All-Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (All-Ukraine Council), an influential, interconfessional government advisory body; the Conference of Representatives of Christian Churches of Ukraine; and the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches each provided a forum to enhance coordination between various denominations, resolve disputes and discuss relevant legislation. As of June 1, 2006, the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches, established in 2005, had eight members representing 80 percent of the country's Protestant organizations.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 233 thousand square miles and a population of 47 million. Estimates of those who considered themselves believers varied widely. A 2003 nationwide survey by a major independent think tank, the Razumkov Center, found that 75.2 percent of the respondents considered themselves believers, 37.4 percent said they attended church, and 21.9 percent said they did not believe in God. As of January 1, 2006, there were 30,507 registered religious organizations, including 29,262 religious communities; the Government estimated that there were approximately 1,679 unregistered religious communities. More than 90 percent of religiously active citizens were Christians, the majority Orthodox. Religious practice was generally strongest in the western part of the country.

In 2004 the national newspaper Den (The Day) published the results of a major poll on religious beliefs by the All-Ukraine Sociological Service. Of the respondents who identified themselves as believers, 50.44 percent said they belonged to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC)-Kiev Patriarchate; 26.13 percent to the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate; 8.02 percent to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (sometimes referred to as the Uniate, Byzantine, or Eastern Rite Church); 7.21 percent to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church; 2.19 percent belonged to the Roman Catholic Church; 2.19 percent identified themselves as Protestants; 0.63 percent responded that they observed Jewish religious practices; and 3.2 percent said they belonged to "other denominations."

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) had 35 eparchies and 10,875 communities (approximately 68 percent of all Orthodox Christian communities in the country), most of which were located in the central, southern, and eastern oblasts. Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) of Kiev headed the denomination within the country. The UOC-MP, which had 9,072 clergy members, referred to itself as The Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kiev Patriarchate (UOC-KP) was formed after independence and has been headed since 1995 by Patriarch Filaret (Denysenko), who was once the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev and all Ukraine. The UOC-KP had 31 eparchies, 3,721 communities, and 2,816 clergy members. Approximately 60 percent of the UOC-KP faithful lived in the western part of the country. The UOC-KP was not recognized by the UOC-MP.

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) was the smallest of the three Orthodox churches in the country; it was founded in 1919 in Kiev. Banned during the Soviet era, it was legalized in 1989 and had 12 eparchies and 1,166 communities, approximately 70 percent of them in the western part of the country. The UAOC had 686 clergy members. In the interest of the possible future unification of the country's Orthodox churches, it did not name a patriarch to succeed the late Patriarch Dmitriy. The UAOC was formally headed in the country by Metropolitan Mefodiy of Ternopil and Podil; however, the large eparchies of Kharkiv-Poltava, Lviv, Rivne-Volyn, and Tavriya have officially broken relations with Mefodiy and have asked to be placed under the direct jurisdiction of Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

The adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) constituted the second largest group of believers after the Christian Orthodox churches. The Council of Brest formed the Church in 1596 to unify Orthodox and Roman Catholic believers. Outlawed by the

Soviet Union in 1946 and legalized in 1989, the UGCC was for forty-three years the single largest banned religious community in the world. The UGCC had 18 eparchies, 3,433 communities, and 2,136 clergy members. The UGCC's members, who constituted a majority of the believers in western Ukraine, numbered approximately four million.

The Roman Catholic Church is traditionally associated with historical pockets of citizens of Polish ancestry who lived mainly in the central and western regions. The Roman Catholic Church had 7 dioceses, 879 communities, and 499 clergy members serving approximately one million persons.

Protestant Churches have grown rapidly in the years since independence. The Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine (the Baptist Union) was the largest group, claiming more than 500 thousand members in more than 3 thousand churches. The Baptist Union had 3,106 clergy members. Other growing communities included Anglicans, Calvinists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, and others.

The Jewish community has a long history in the country. Estimates of the size of the current Jewish population varied. According to a 2001 census, the State Committee of Statistics estimated that there were 103,600 Jews in the country. Some Jewish community leaders, however, said the Jewish population could be as high as 300 thousand. The 2004 All-Ukraine Sociological Service poll appeared to corroborate the higher figure. Observers believed that 35 to 40 percent of the Jewish population was active communally; there were 240 registered Jewish organizations. Most observant Jews were Orthodox. There were 104 Chabad-Lubavitch communities in the country. The Progressive (Reform) Jewish movement had forty-eight communities.

Some Muslim leaders estimated that there were two million Muslims in the country, although estimates by the government and independent think tanks were substantially lower, approximately 500 thousand. There were 457 registered Muslim communities, 320 of them on the Crimean peninsula. Sheikh Akhmed Tamim, the mufti of Ukraine, was a member of the All-Ukraine Council. According to Sheikh Tamim, approximately fifty thousand Muslims, mostly foreign, lived in Kiev. The majority of the country's Muslims were Crimean Tatars, who were forcibly deported from Crimea to Uzbekistan by Stalin in 1944; they were permitted to return to the country in 1989. There were approximately 300 thousand Crimean Tatars in Ukraine; 267 thousand lived on the peninsula.

The Government estimated that there were more than fifteen nontraditional religious movements in the country. As of January 1, 2006, twenty-nine Krishna Consciousness communities and forty-seven Buddhist communities were registered.

According to the Government, as of January 1, 2006, there were 175 theological educational institutions with 9,721 full-time and 10,727 correspondence students. Foreign religious workers were active in many religious groups. The Government estimated that approximately 51 percent of priests in the Roman Catholic community were foreign citizens. Foreign religious workers also played a particularly active role in Protestant and Mormon communities, where missionary activity was central to community growth. The Jewish community also depended on foreign religious workers, since many rabbis were not citizens.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The 1996 constitution and the 1991 law on freedom of conscience provide for freedom of religion. The Government generally sought at all levels to protect this right and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. However, some minority and nontraditional religious groups experienced difficulties in registration and in buying and leasing property.

There is no formal state religion; however, the UOC-MP and the UGCC tended to dominate in the east and west of the country, respectively. Local authorities frequently sided with the religious majority in a particular region. In many areas of the east and south they tended to side with the UOC-MP. For example, according to representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Odesa city council, at the urging of local UOC-MP leaders, greatly restricted the work of the Catholic charity Caritas with street children. Conversely, in the western part of the country, local authorities often supported the UGCC and UOC-KP.

On March 22, 2006, President Yushchenko called for the creation of a unified Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which the UOC-MP and major Protestant denominations opposed. The UOC-MP publicly cautioned the president against "politicizing" and "artificially" speeding up the unification process.

The courts do not always interpret the law in a manner that protects religious freedom, often siding with the dominant local religious organization. For example, in a case that received national and international media and nongovernmental organization (NGO) attention, a local court in Cherkasy Oblast exonerated a UOC-MP priest of assault and hate crime charges for beating six members of Jehovah's Witnesses with his walking stick. The priest admitted that he beat the persons and publicly boasted that he would "do it again," claiming that the six came onto his property and pushed him. The Jehovah's Witnesses also reported that two female Jehovah's Witnesses were attacked in Donetsk Region. According to the Witnesses, police refused to file a complaint under Article 161 (religious enmity) of the criminal code.

The country officially celebrates numerous religious holidays, including Christmas, Easter Monday, and Holy Trinity Day, all according to the Julian calendar shared by the Orthodox churches and the Greek Catholics.

The law requires religious groups to register their "articles and statutes" either as a local or national organization and to have at least ten adult members in order to obtain the status of a "juridical entity." Registration is necessary to conduct many day-to-day business activities including publishing, banking, and property transactions. By law, the registration process should take one month, or three months if the Government requests an expert opinion on the group's legitimacy. Registration denials may be appealed in court.

According to the law, registered religious organizations maintain a privileged status as the only organizations permitted to seek restitution of communal property confiscated by the Soviet regime. During the period covered by this report, most buildings and objects subject to restitution were those immediately necessary for religious worship. Communities must apply to regional authorities for property restitution. While consideration of a restitution claim should be completed within a month, it frequently takes much longer.

Intracommunal competition for particular properties complicated restitution claims for the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities. The slow pace of restitution was partly a reflection of the country's economic situation, which limited funds available to relocate occupants of seized religious property. Some groups asserted that there was progress in the restitution of property, while others reported little or no progress. Many properties for which restitution was being sought were occupied by state institutions or were historic landmarks. All major religious organizations called on the Government to establish a transparent legal process to address restitution claims.

The registration process is administered by the Ministry of Justice's State Department for Religious Issues (SDRI), the successor organization to the Soviet-legacy State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA), which was abolished in April 2005 by presidential decree. Representatives of most major religious organizations, NGOs, and think tanks, who generally viewed the SCRA as an antiquated, corrupt, Soviet-style organization, cautiously welcomed the decision. According to the Government, the creation of SDRI was intended to "take the politics" out of the registration process and bring the law into conformity with European norms. However, some major religious organizations criticized the move, noting that the SCRA, while flawed, played a valuable role as the religious community's voice in the Government, helping to mediate disputes between religious organizations and various government agencies. Some observers noted that the SDRI, which was establishing its position in relation to regional departments of religious issues, lacked sufficient power over oblast and municipal level departments.

Mormon leaders asserted that during the period covered by this report, the Chernivtsi municipal government refused to permit the registration of a Mormon community.

The Autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church in America asserted that the SDRI refused to register the organization, a charge the SDRI denied.

Muslim representatives in Kiev and Crimea noted that they have had difficulty registering communities. In Kharkiv Oblast, the government for the past twelve years repeatedly refused to register a Muslim community. Islamic community leaders also expressed frustration with the Ministry of Education, which had not registered an Islamic school.

The law restricts the activities of foreign-based religious organizations and narrowly defines the permissible activities of members of the clergy, preachers, teachers, and other noncitizen representatives of foreign-based religious organizations; however, in practice there were no reports that the Government used the law to limit the activity of such religious organizations. Religious worker visas require invitations from registered religious organizations in the country and the approval of the Government. Foreign religious workers may preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities "only in those religious organizations that invited them to Ukraine and with official approval of the governmental body that registered the statutes and the articles of the pertinent religious organization." In 2005, 8,349 foreigners were issued visas for religious work; approximately 3,500 of those visas were issued to clergymen who intended to preach or do long-term missionary work. According to the Government, no visa applications by foreign religious workers were rejected during the period covered by this report.

Under the law, religion cannot be part of the public school curriculum. However, President Yushchenko, with the support of the country's four top Christian clergymen, instructed the Ministry of Education to introduce "ethics of faith" training courses into public school curricula beginning September 1, 2005. According to the SDRI, prominent religious leaders, and the media, nationwide implementation had been haphazard. In some schools in the eastern part of the country, students study the "ethics of faith" but also continue to take an "ethics" course developed in Soviet times based on atheist doctrine. In Kharkiv Oblast, fifth-year students may elect to study Christian ethics, but only with their parents' consent. While Jewish leaders support the teaching of ethics and civics in school, they have insisted on a nonsectarian approach to the training. Schools run by religious communities may, and do, include religious education as an extracurricular activity.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding by frequently consulting with the All-Ukraine Council, whose membership represents the religious groups of more than 90 percent of the religiously active population. The council, which has a rotating chairmanship, meets once every two or three months, providing members and government representatives the opportunity to discuss interfaith concerns. The council has also provided a forum through which religious organizations can consult with the Government on relevant draft legislation. President Yushchenko met with the council on March 3, 2006. Oblast state administrations and local religious leaders in most regions of the country have formed oblast councils of churches and religious organizations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Mormon leaders in Kiev complained about the Government's unwillingness to allow a Mormon representative to join the All-Ukraine Council. They argued that the refusal denied their organization the appearance of legitimacy and discouraged broadcast media outlets from allowing the Mormons to purchase airtime.

Representatives of the UOC-KP, the UAOC, the UGCC, and the Roman Catholic Church alleged that local governments in the south and east favored the UOC-MP in matters of property restitution and registration. Representatives from the UOC-KP specifically complained that the Odesa and Poltava oblast governments deliberately delayed the registration of congregations that, in accordance with the law, had changed jurisdictions from the UOC-MP to the UOC-KP.

Representatives of progressive Jewish communities noted that the government of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast permitted only the registration of

Chabad Jewish communities and complained about property restitution difficulties with the Kharkiv municipal government.

Senior leaders of the UOC-MP complained that, in the wake of the 2004 Orange Revolution and the election of President Yushchenko, the UOC-MP had been discriminated against by the Rivne, Ternopil, and Lviv oblast governments. UOC-MP representatives asserted that local officials and UOC-KP supporters in Rivne Oblast threatened UOC-MP clergy and their family members.

Greek Catholic Cardinal Husar, as well as prominent members of the country's Jewish community, continued to call on the Government to amend the education law, which prohibits religious organizations, such as the UGCC, from establishing and running primary and secondary schools.

According to Roman Catholic Bishop Bronislav Bernatsky, the Odesa municipal government, acting at the behest of the UOC-MP, restricted the training of Roman Catholic priests for the diocese of Odesa-Simferopol. Specifically, the municipal government refused to authorize the restitution of Odesa's Roman Catholic seminary, which was confiscated by the Soviet regime, and criticized Bishop Bernatsky for having "too many foreign priests" in the diocese.

There is no chaplain corps in the military. However, members of the armed forces have regular access to religious services, and many military units have priests. Christian symbols and ceremonies are routinely used in the armed forces.

The Government continued to facilitate the building of houses of worship. As of January 1, 2006, religious organizations in the country were using 21,075 places of worship, of which approximately 6,200 were rented. As of January 1, 2006, 2,420 religious buildings were under construction. During the period 1992-2004, government funds and donations were used to construct 4,398 places of worship. Representatives of the Jewish and Baptist communities have complained, however, that state funds were allocated only for Orthodox church buildings. The Government had not allocated funds for the construction or reconstruction of synagogues, for example.

Members of numerous communities described difficulties in dealing with the municipal administrations in Kiev and other large cities to obtain land and building permits. These problems, however, were not limited to religious groups.

Representatives of the UGCC complained of discrimination by the Odesa municipal government, which blocked the Church's efforts to obtain land in the city.

Evangelical Protestant leaders expressed concern about discrimination by the Kherson and Odesa regional and municipal governments and complained about interference with religious services, refusal to sell property to build churches, and failure to protect Church property rights.

Leaders of the All-Ukraine Baptist Union complained about the prosecutor general's effort to seize the Union's headquarters building in downtown Kiev. Baptist Union officials could not rule out the possibility that the prosecutor general's action was linked to domestic politics, as one influential politician was a prominent Baptist minister.

Despite requests from the Roman Catholic Church, including the late pope, John Paul II, the Government had not transferred its ownership of St. Nicholas' Cathedral and a former residence of Roman Catholic bishops in Kiev to the Church. The Church was, however, permitted to use the cathedral for daily morning Mass, on weekends, and during major religious holidays. Roman Catholic representatives also expressed frustration about unrealized restitution claims in Chernivtsi, Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, Mykolayiv, Sevastopol, and Simferopol.

There was no progress in the resolution of the high-profile and long-running dispute over inappropriate use of a Jewish cemetery in the Volyn Oblast town of Volodymyr-Volynsky. In 2002 a local court ordered a halt in the construction of an apartment building on the site of the cemetery. However, according to the Volodymyr-Volynsky municipal council, apartment construction was completed during 2003, and most of the units were occupied. Local Jewish groups complained that the Ministry of Justice continued to refuse to help resolve this dispute.

Representatives of the Muslim community asserted that the Government's slow pace of communal property restitution undermined the authority of moderate Muslim leaders. For example, they argued that Muslims--particularly in Crimea--were more willing to listen to strident Islamist views, especially those espoused by Crimean Tatar followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which advocated the establishment of an international Islamic state. Muslim community leaders complained in particular about unresolved restitution claims involving a 118-year-old mosque in Mykolayiv, a famed mosque in Dnipropetrovsk, a 150-year-old mosque in the Crimean town of Masandra, and the ruins of an 18th-century mosque in the Crimean coastal city of Alushta.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversions, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

There were a number of acts of anti-Semitism during the period covered by this report; at least four of them involved physical attacks. On August 28, 2005, a group of skinheads assaulted two yeshiva students in Kiev. One of the students had his skull partially crushed with a beer bottle. On August 31, 2005, police arrested three of the alleged assailants, who were charged with criminal hooliganism. On September 1,

2005, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Henady Moskal told the press that the attack was not motivated by anti-Semitism, an assertion that was publicly questioned by prominent members of the Jewish community. President Yushchenko publicly condemned the assault.

On September 11, 2005, a group of skinheads assaulted a rabbi and his son in Kiev. Police detained a group of suspects; two were charged with criminal hooliganism. On December 12, 2005, the country's correspondent of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency was severely beaten by unidentified assailants; as of June 1, 2006, the police investigation remained ongoing.

On February 3, 2006, a man stormed into the Brodsky Synagogue in downtown Kiev and demanded to see the rabbi. Security guards found a knife on the man, and police arrested him. On March 6, 2006, a yeshiva student used an air-pellet gun to fend off four men on a Kiev subway train who kicked him to the ground while shouting anti-Semitic insults. The student shot one of the assailants in the face with the pellet gun, which he had purchased following the August 28, 2005, attack referenced above. The assailants were arrested at the scene. On April 21, 2006, a group of skinheads beat and stabbed an Israeli yeshiva student in Dnipropetrovsk; the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced on May 5, 2006, that a criminal case of hooliganism would be brought against the assailants. The ministry also noted that prosecutors were continuing to examine the motives behind the attack, which could lead to additional "interethnic hostility" charges.

Police in Simferopol continued to investigate a January 2005 incident in which a group of skinheads assaulted thirteen students from a Chabad Jewish day school, including two girls who required hospitalization.

There were no indications that the police were investigating assaults on two rabbis in 2004 in Odesa and on a yeshiva student in Donetsk. Similarly, there was no progress reported in police investigations into two separate 2004 attacks on rabbis near Kiev's Brodsky Synagogue.

There were also several instances in which synagogues, cemeteries, and Holocaust memorials were vandalized, particularly in Sevastopol, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa; police follow-up often appeared to be ineffectual, especially in Dnipropetrovsk. However, there was an effective official response in other cases. For example, the Security Service of Ukraine on June 6, 2006, detained a suspect in the March 23, 2006, desecration of a Holocaust memorial in Sevastopol. In addition, four neo-Nazis were sentenced February 7, 2005, for vandalizing gravestones in a cemetery in the Donetsk Oblast in 2004. The court issued suspended sentences for the two adult defendants and ordered "compulsory educational measures" under parental supervision for two juveniles. According to media reports, the local Jewish community requested light sentences for the vandals, who came from extremely poor families. In Rivne, municipal authorities restored the Sosonky memorial, which was desecrated in 2004.

There were no indications that police were investigating the vandalism of several dozen tombstones in 2004 at Jewish and Christian burial sites in Kiev's Kurenivske Cemetery.

Despite continued mediation efforts by local Jewish and Greek Catholic leaders, a long-standing dispute between nationalists and Jews over the erection of crosses in an old Jewish cemetery in Sambir remained unresolved. On May 3, 2006, the Supreme Administrative Court of Ukraine rejected an appeal by the Union of Councils of Soviet Jewry to take ownership of the cemetery.

Anti-Semitism was also evident in public life. For example, on August 8, 2005, the fringe Ukrainian Conservative Party, associated with the anti-Semitic Inter-Regional Academy of Personnel Management (known by its Ukrainian acronym MAUP), ostensibly an academic institution seen by many as a diploma mill, published an "open letter" to President Yushchenko calling for the criminal prosecution of Hasidic Rabbis for "the dissemination in Ukraine of Judeo-Nazi teachings."

In the March 26, 2006, parliamentary elections, the Ukrainian Conservative Party received only 0.09 percent of the national vote. Despite an intensive advertising campaign, the party failed to win the necessary 3 percent to be represented in Parliament.

Anti-Semitic articles appeared frequently in small publications and irregular newsletters, although such articles rarely appeared in the national press.

MAUP, which receives significant funding from several Middle Eastern government sources, remained the most persistent anti-Semitic presence in the country. It published a monthly journal *Personnel* and a weekly newspaper *Personnel Plus*, which was the subject of an ongoing criminal investigation by the Prosecutor General's Office. According to Jewish organizations, MAUP accounted for nearly 85 percent of all anti-Semitic material published in the country during the year. On December 5, 2005, President Yushchenko issued a public statement criticizing MAUP for its anti-Semitic publications. The president also issued an executive order barring civil servants from studying or teaching at MAUP branch affiliates and ordered the Ministry of Education to review the licenses of all MAUP affiliates. In March 2006 seven such affiliates, out of approximately fifty across the country, were closed because of unspecified licensing violations. In a January 23, 2006, national television interview, Foreign Minister Tarasyuk also stressed that "there is no place for any form of anti-Semitism or xenophobia in Ukraine."

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

There were several improvements in respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

On September 23, 2005, President Yushchenko issued a decree ordering educational and research institutions at all levels to strengthen teaching about tolerance and interdenominational understanding. The decree, "On Measures to Fulfill State Policies in the Sphere of International Relations, Religions and Churches," included an order to take immediate steps to resume work of the Interagency Commission set up in 2002, with the primary goal of returning property to religious communities. According to the decree, the Government began preparations to appropriately commemorate the sixty-fifth anniversary of the September 1941 Babyn Yar massacre in Kiev by Nazi forces. On March 15, 2006, the Cabinet of Ministers restarted work of the commission.

On January 20, 2006, the president issued a decree instructing the Ministry of Justice to draft a new version of the Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, improve restitution-related rules and regulations, and extend the basis for granting conscripts the right to alternative (nonmilitary) service.

On March 9, 2006, the chief of the Presidential Secretariat formed a working group to examine matters emerging in church-state relations, prepare proposals to address them, and improve laws pertaining to religious freedom.

On April 4, 2006, the Supreme Rada adopted the amended Law on Military Duty and Military Service granting deferment from military conscription to full-time students of theological schools and their graduates holding clerical posts. The law also grants them exemption from military reserve training.

On April 25, 2006, Defense Minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko signed a directive designed to accommodate the religious needs of servicemen and guarantee their constitutional rights of religious freedom. Representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches of the Kiev and Moscow Patriarchates, Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic Churches, and All-Ukraine Baptist Union actively worked with the Ministry of Defense in drafting the decree.

During the March 2006 parliamentary and local elections, most major religious organizations generally avoided political involvement. For example, rather than backing specific political parties, many senior religious figures urged their congregations to pray for free and fair elections. Human rights organizations noted that this was a major improvement over the 2004 presidential elections, when UOC-MP priests in the eastern part of the country actively campaigned for then prime minister Viktor Yanukovich by reading special prayers on his behalf, urging the faithful to vote for him, and denouncing then opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko as a "servant of the devil."

The Government continued to make progress in returning to religious groups communal properties expropriated during the Soviet era. For example, during the period covered by this report, the Government returned eight Orthodox churches to communities in Kharkiv Oblast, including the Church of the Holy Protection; the Holy Nativity and Holy Cross monasteries in Khmelnytsky Oblast to the UOC-MP; St. John's Roman Catholic Church in Zhytomyr; the Roman Catholic Metropolitan's Residence in Lviv; the German Lutheran Church in Odesa; and, synagogues in Lutsk and Sumy.

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) expressed satisfaction with the Government's handling of a legal dispute between ROCA and the UOC-KP over ownership of the Holy Trinity Church in Odesa Oblast. The dispute was resolved through the courts in ROCA's favor.

The SDRI, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Border Guard Committee, State Customs Service, State Committee for Tourism, and other agencies, met numerous times to develop plans to support Jewish pilgrimages to the burial site in Uman of Rabbi Nakhman Tsadyk, founder of the Bratslav Hasidic movement. According to the media, more than twenty thousand Hasidim traveled to Uman in 2005, the largest number in the country's post-independence history.

In Medzhybizh, (Khmelnytsky Oblast) the city government worked with the local Jewish community to create a new synagogue and pilgrimage center for Hasidic Jews.

In response to requests from local Jewish organizations, the Kirovohrad municipal government banned construction on a Holocaust remembrance site. The local Jewish community was given permission to build a small memorial and park at the location.

In response to a long-standing complaint from Crimean Tatar leaders, the Bakhchysarai municipal government agreed to relocate the city's central market from the territory of Azyzler, an ancient Muslim cemetery and pilgrimage site for Crimean Tatars. Bakhchysarai's mayor also announced plans to build a museum and memorial complex at the site.

In response to U.S. and EU diplomacy, and efforts by prominent NGOs and international academic institutions, the Ministry of Education on March 9, 2006, reversed its longstanding policy and officially recognized theology as an academic discipline. Prior to the ministry's decision, students majoring in theology were subject to the draft, ineligible for student discounts, and had difficulty finding work in the country because their degrees were not recognized.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, conflicts between local representatives of contending religious organizations in some cases adversely affected broader ties among religious groups in society.

During the period covered by this report, senior leaders of the UOC-MP alleged that supporters of the UOC-KP attacked UOC-MP clergy and seized a number of UOC-MP churches. The UOC-MP cited numerous such incidents, including in Rivne, Ternopil, and Chernivtsi regions, claiming that UOC-KP was emboldened by the success of the 2004 Orange Revolution, the Yushchenko presidency, and indications that the Ecumenical Patriarch might recognize their church as the country's canonical Orthodox Church.

The UOC-KP rejected the allegations, noting that many UOC-MP communities exercised their legal right to change jurisdictions from the UOC-MP to the UOC-KP. Patriarch Filaret asserted that in the Rivne Oblast town of Ostroh on October 27, 2005, UOC-MP priests and supporters from Crimea physically intimidated and humiliated parishioners of the Church of the Holy Ascension, which had legally switched jurisdictions from the UOC-MP to the UOC-KP.

Representatives of the ROCA voiced complaints about the UOC-MP, asserting that the UOC-MP demanded the surrender of ROCA church buildings in Malyn, Zhytomyr Oblast, and pressured local authorities to prevent the registration of a ROCA community in Khotin, Chernivtsi Oblast.

The UOC-MP accused the UGCC of attempting to expand in regions where the Moscow Patriarchate was traditionally strong. The accusation appeared to be based on the UGCC's plans to establish a patriarchate and on the relocation of Cardinal Husar's headquarters from Lviv to Kiev on August 21, 2005, a move which the UOC-MP strongly protested.

Evangelical Protestant leaders complained about the activities of the group "Dialogue," which they and human rights groups characterized as a front for the UOC-MP that promoted hostility toward non-Orthodox Christians.

On February 6, 2006, the Association of Christian Journalists, Publishers, and Broadcasters criticized the STB television network for airing a program that attacked evangelical churches. According to the association, the program misrepresented the beliefs of traditional Protestant Churches (including Lutherans and Baptists) and referred to evangelical Protestants as "Satanists."

At an April 17, 2006, press conference, the president of the major Protestant Christian media group, Serhiy Belbovets, criticized what he called "a series" of television and newspaper reports that characterized evangelical Christians as "fanatics" and "members of sects." He called on all churches in the country to "stand together, shoulder to shoulder, to defend Christian values."

Senior Mormon leaders in Kiev asserted that believers faced discrimination from some government officials and from the UOC-MP and UOC-KP. They expressed concern about efforts by these churches to prevent the establishment of a Mormon community in Chernivtsi. In official correspondence with the city government, local UOC-MP and UOC-KP leaders accused the Mormons of encroaching on an "Orthodox city."

Muslim leaders in Crimea, as well as members of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, the major, but unofficial, organization representing Crimean Tatars, accused the UOC-MP of encouraging anti-Muslim and anti-Tatar violence in Crimea. UOC-MP priests in Crimea reportedly assured ethnic Russian vigilantes, who refer to themselves as Cossacks, that violence against Muslim Tatars was justified in order to "protect Orthodoxy" in Crimea.

Mejlis members and Crimea-based human rights groups continued to criticize the Crimean government for permitting schools to use textbooks that contained inflammatory and historically inaccurate material about Tatar Muslims. Human rights activists specifically noted that a common textbook for fifth graders, Viktor Misan's *Stories on the History of Ukraine*, contained more than twenty pejorative references to Muslims, including the fallacy that Tatar children had frequently used "elderly and disabled Ukrainian captives for archery and saber practice." Similarly, A.K. Shchvidko's eighth-grade textbook, *History of Ukraine, 16-18th Centuries*, depicted Muslims in a negative light, erroneously asserting, for example, that "there wasn't a year when Tatars did not invade Ukraine, burn its villages and towns, slaughter its citizens, and take prisoners." One major Crimea-based human rights group noted that such misinformation created an impression among young people that "Tatars are bad for Ukraine and that to kill and rob them is a blessed deed."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government frequently discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and religious leaders as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. A majority of foreign religious workers were U.S. citizens, and the embassy continued to intervene as necessary to defend their rights to due process under the law.

Embassy officers tracked developments in religious freedom court cases involving different faiths and denominations. For example, the embassy continued to monitor the longstanding Sambir and Volodymyr-Volynsky cemetery cases and also pressed the Prosecutor General's Office for an explanation of its attempt to seize the downtown Kiev headquarters of the Baptist Union.

Throughout the period covered by this report, the ambassador raised the broader topics of communal property restitution and cultural heritage preservation in meetings and correspondence with government officials at the highest levels, including the president, prime minister, foreign minister, justice minister, and transportation minister.

On numerous occasions, the ambassador raised with senior government officials, including President Yushchenko, the issue of tolerance and combating anti-Semitism. He urged the Government to address the foreign-funded anti-Semitic activities of MAUP and encouraged the Interior Ministry, the Prosecutor General's Office, and the Dnipropetrovsk municipal government to take appropriate actions in response to anti-Semitic incidents. On December 5, 2005, President Yushchenko denounced all expressions of anti-Semitism and xenophobia. He condemned MAUP's systematic publication of anti-Semitic material and urged MAUP's leadership to stop inciting interethnic hatred. In addition, during a January 23, 2006, national television interview, Foreign Minister Tarasyuk stressed that "there is no place for any form of anti-Semitism or xenophobia in Ukraine."

In a July 2005 letter to the Minister of Education, the ambassador argued strongly for the official recognition of theology as a legitimate field of academic study, pointing out the hardships faced by students of theology. On March 9, 2006, the ministry officially recognized theology as an academic discipline, due in part to the embassy's efforts.

During the period covered by this report, embassy officers continued to maintain close contact not only with clerics but also with lay leaders in religious communities and representatives of faith-based social service organizations, such as Caritas, the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, which were active in the country. In addition, the embassy facilitated similar meetings with these groups for members of Congress and other visiting U.S. officials.

Embassy officers also met with Muslim leaders in Kiev and Crimea throughout the period covered by this report in an effort to understand the concerns of those communities. For example, the ambassador attended the April 10, 2006, plenary session of the Congress of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine, meeting personally with the mufti of Ukraine, Sheikh Akhmed Tamim.

The embassy funded three major International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) groups on advancing religious freedom and promoting tolerance. In September 2005 a trio of legal experts from the Ministry of Justice and the SDRI visited the United States to examine, among other things, how religious organizations are treated under federal, state, and local law, and how cities protect religious heritage sites like cemeteries. In November 2005 a group of prominent clergymen from the major religious groups visited the United States to better understand how interfaith dialogue strengthens tolerance in American society. (A representative from the UOC-MP was invited and encouraged to participate in this IVLP program but declined.) In April 2006 a group of writers and researchers who specialize in the Holocaust and Holodomor (Stalinist Terror Famine of 1932-33) visited the United States to examine how the United States remembers and teaches young people about the Holocaust and other tragic events, such as slavery and the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

During the period covered by this report, the embassy approved a grant to Ukrainian Catholic University's Institute of Religion and Society to monitor religious freedom in the country and post the results on its widely read and widely respected web site. The embassy also provided financial support to Kiev's annual Klezmer (traditional Jewish folk music) festival.

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